DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 372 CE 074 896

AUTHOR	Parecki, Andrea DeBruin; Paris, Scott G.; Seidenberg, Jennifer L.
TITLE	Characteristics of Effective Family Literacy Programs in Michigan.
INSTITUTION	National Center on Adult Literacy, Philadelphia, PA.
REPORT NO	NCAL-TR-96-07
PUB DATE	1996-00-00
NOTE	20p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Center on Adult Literacy, University of Pennsylvania, 3910 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3111 (order no. TR96-07).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; *Family Literacy; *Family Relationship; Illiteracy; *Literacy Education; Models; Preschool Education; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Michigan

ABSTRACT

A study examined the broad range of family literacy programs across Michigan to document how goals, instructional practice, assessment methods, staff training, and social support for participants varied. Three established models of family literacy were identified and described: the Kenan Model, Parents as Partners in Reading (PPR), and HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters). Four programs were selected to demonstrate how family literacy was implemented in very different circumstances. The first three adapted nationally recognized models. The Maple Tree Even Start program adopted the Kenan Model; Allen Prison offered PPR; and a family literacy program in a large metropolitan city in southwestern Michigan adopted HIPPY. The existing models provided some guidance for programs that had little directions. All the models had problems in terms of adequately providing a complete and inclusive framework for new and existing programs. The Christian Outreach Center created its own framework by taking bits and pieces from various commercial materials and packaged curricula that could lead to a hodgepodge of materials and activities without a coherent framework. Strengths of successful programs were as follows: responsiveness to cultural, familial, and community characteristics; collaboration with surrounding agencies (social, medical, governmental, job skills programs); good referral system; and overcome barriers that would otherwise hinder increased access and participation. Weaknesses in family literacy programs were also identified: unbalanced components, inappropriate assessment, irrelevant curricula, and narrow perspective. (Contains 19 references.) (YLB)

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Characteristics of Effective Family Literacy Programs in Michigan

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University of Michigan

NCAL Technical Report TR96-07
1996

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Characteristics of Effective Family Literacy Programs in Michigan

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Abstract

Family literacy is a relatively new field that integrates knowledge from psychology, education, social work, and literacy and applies the information to improve the educational achievement and economic well-being of families. The purpose of this study was to identify popular models and practices in contemporary family literacy programs in Michigan and to document how programs adapt their instruction and services to the special needs of their participants. Four case studies of different programs illustrate the diversity of participants and range of practices and services that are provided under the broad label of family literacy programs. Critical features of successful programs are noted and persistent problems are identified.

National Center on Adult Literacy

Introduction

Poverty, illiteracy, poor education, and social risks are correlated problems in America. According to the National Adult Literacy Survey (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 1993), the majority of adults who demonstrated literacy skills in the lowest levels of proficiency were living in poverty. Current research has shown that children in these homes are less likely to enter school prepared to learn and are more likely to drop out before they complete high school (Edwards, 1995; Fine, 1991; Heath, 1983). Higher levels of adult education have been shown to have a positive impact on the income level as well as the educational future of the children in a family. Education may very well play a large part in improving the lives of impoverished people. However, it has not been a panacea for many who, rebuffed by past school failure, do not seek further education or do not consider it a solution to their problems.

During the past decade, policymakers, educators, and business people at the national, state, and local levels have begun to look for ways to make adult education programs more meaningful and useful to adults and their children. A common goal of people in these diverse fields was to design an educational agenda that would reinforce the roles that schools and communities can play in strengthening the skills that parents need to enhance a family's learning experiences and to improve children's future success in school (Congressional Oversight Hearing on the Even Start Program, 1992; Darling, 1989). This emphasis on community and family resources as a pathway to remedy low literacy skills and their resulting effects on the family led to the birth of an innovative, exciting new field, family literacy, which promotes intergenerational learning activities.

Although widely endorsed by policymakers and educators, the field of family literacy is struggling to define its goals and practices. Even the definition of family literacy is difficult because the many programs and services offered under the umbrella term vary widely across the nation. Different definitions of family literacy are derived from various theories in fields such as adult literacy, emergent literacy, developmental psychology, multiculturalism, and social justice among others. Morrow, Paratore, and Tracey (1994), in a recent attempt to unravel its meaning, wrote:

> Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during routines of daily living and helps adults and children get things done. . . . family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives. Family literacy activities may also reflect the ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved. (pp. 7–8)

This is a general and vague description of family literacy without theoretical foundations or means of implementation. The lack of clear definitions may be one reason why family literacy programs include such diverse practices. Another reason is that programs differ vastly in the populations that they serve, the resources at their disposal, and the professional training of their staff. This leads to huge differences in interpretations of goals, instructional practices, assessment methods, and means of supporting their clients both educationally and socially. It is the need to respond to these differences that has caused many programs to adapt local and national models of family literacy to suit their unique populations and circumstances. As these models become modified, the variations in family literacy become more numerous. Some programs choose to emphasize the direct teaching of conventional literacy skills, whereas others may be more philanthropic in nature, looking beyond educational instruction to other means of increasing the economic and social well-being of their clients. Some programs focus on adults and some programs focus on children, although many are attempting to target the whole family in their activities.

The diversity of family literacy programs makes it difficult to label or categorize programs according to neatly defined characteristics but it may be useful to consider a continuum that appears to underlie various programs. The continuum of "context sensitivity" describes the program focus as relatively didactic or responsive. At the didactic end of the continuum, programs tend to be prescriptive in their emphases on traditional educational skills and materials whereas, at the other end, responsive programs tend to accommodate the special needs of the participants. Responsive family literacy programs support parenting skills and job preparation, in addition to literacy development, and they promote family independence (Auerbach, 1989, 1995; Gadsden, 1992, 1994).

A majority of researchers, administrators, teachers, and policymakers believe that an integrated approach to family literacy, one that balances both endpoints on the continuum, is the key to establishing successful programs (Auerbach, 1989; Gadsden, 1994; Morrow, 1995). Programs that have become elaborated systems and that offer more than just the teaching of reading and writing appear to be more successful than those with a strict literacy emphasis. In addition to skills instruction, issues of access, child care, transportation, community and cultural orientation, and personal meaningfulness are considered in these programs. However, these programs often develop without a coherent conceptual framework that integrates program goals, instructional practices, assessment methods, staff training, and social support for participants. This makes it difficult to assess the success of existing programs and to assist new programs as they search for ways in which to implement family literacy.

This study, conducted in 1994, examined the broad range of family literacy programs across the state of Michigan. The purpose was to document how goals, instructional practice, assessment methods, staff training, and social support for participants varied across different programs. We selected four representative programs to demonstrate how these features of family literacy are implemented in very different circumstances. The first three programs adapted nationally recognized models, whereas the fourth one is a community-based program, which developed its own model. The established models are described first to provide a context for the program descriptions. Along with the brief summaries of these models, their strengths and weaknesses are noted.

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Models of Family Literacy

Kenan Model

The Kenan Family Literacy Project began in 1986, when the Kentucky Legislature funded the Parents And Child Education (PACE) program in six rural counties throughout the state. Because of the program's early success in raising families' literacy skills and self-esteem, the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust funded a large grant to be used to expand the existing program. In 1989, in response to the national recognition given to the newly modified PACE model, now called the Kenan Family Literacy Model, the National Center for Family Literacy was established with funds from the Kenan Trust. This center was charged with continually improving this model and disseminating information about family literacy across the country (Brizius & Foster, 1993; Seaman, Popp, & Darling, 1991).

The Kenan Family Literacy Model is based on a curriculum that includes four key components: adult education, parenting support, early childhood education, and interactive parent-child activities. Adult education classes focus on parents developing reading and math skills and setting goals. Parents may work toward passing the high school equivalency exam or

may receive assistance in preparing to enter the workforce. The parenting component allows parents to discuss relevant issues such as child development, self-esteem, health issues, social services, or career options in a supportive group setting. Early childhood education classes stress pre-literacy, and organizational and social skills with the overall aim to prepare children for success in school. In addition to separate adult and child education, the Kenan Model incorporates Parents And Children Together, known as PACT time, when parents and children interact around various learning activities. During this time, parents help to guide their children in developmentally appropriate activities, fulfilling their roles as their children's most important teachers.

This model addresses the broad areas that are important within an integrative family literacy program. However, much of the time is spent on separate activities for adults and children with PACT time representing only a small portion of the suggested plan. Programs are usually left on their own to design curricula within the four large components or to find ready-made instructional plans to borrow. This is not easy for many new programs to accomplish. The National Center for Family Literacy does attempt to provide training and sup;ort for programs, but even within this training, there is little opportunity for programs to gain direct knowledge of curriculum or assessment design.

Parents as Partners in Reading

The Parents as Partners in Reading program was designed to teach parents how to read effectively to their children and, in turn, to provide the language and reading-readiness skills that children need in order to learn how to read and write themselves (Edwards, 1989, 1991, 1995). This program is divided into three phases: coaching, peer modeling, and parent-child interaction. During the coaching phase, a group leader models book reading behavior and strategies that are then reinforced by corresponding videotapes. The coaching sessions provide parents with opportunities to learn successful models of interactive book reading with their children. The peer modeling phase of instruction focuses on parents taking control of the book reading sessions in order to help each other to use appropriate strategies with their children. Parents have the opportunity to model, for the entire group, how they would read a book to their child while other participants provide feedback and coach one another in the use of strategies. In the final phase, parent-child interaction, the parents bring their own children to the sessions and practice their acquired strategies with them. The rest of the group functions as a source of support and encouragement as children become active participants in book reading with their parents. The Parents as Partners in Reading program promotes parent-child interaction with literacy by demonstrating appropriate book reading strategies, allowing opportunities for parents to practice these techniques, and encouraging parents to incorporate these strategies in reading with their own children.

Parents as Partners in Reading is a theoretically sound model based on research about parents and children reading together and the positive effects that this reading can have on children's future success in school (Flood, 1977; Teale, 1981). The strategies taught and the means used to teach them have worked quite well. However, this program was not designed to provide a comprehensive model of family literacy. It does not directly address issues of parenting, job skills, activities other than reading, or adult education beyond the reading strategies taught. Community involvement has played a large role in recruiting and retaining people in the program; however, any socialization or support beyond the scheduled classes is not a planned part of this model. This program is useful as one component for teaching literacy skills in a more comprehensive family program.

HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters)

The Home Instruction Program for Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY) model of family literacy originally began in Israel in 1969 to help immigrant children gain the same advantages in learning that native Israeli children have. HIPPY has spread internationally to Germany, New Zealand, Chile, Turkey, South Africa, and Mexico and was first introduced in the United States in 1986 (HIPPY, 1993). The objectives described in the international mission statement of HIPPY are

- strengthen parent-child interactions,
- benefit the overall development of the child,
- promote literacy-rich environments,
- build on family strengths,
- enhance the development of the parents' role as primary teacher and educator, and
- target specifically those families that need the most support.

Through its home-based early childhood enrichment program, which is supported by a wealth of curricula and materials, HIPPY seeks to prepare children ages 3–5 years for their future academic education, to bolster children's self-esteem and confidence, and to provide an environment where children explore their worlds through reading. HIPPY's goal is to motivate parents to become the primary educators in their children's lives because children's learning must begin in the home. HIPPY encourages and assists families in building their strengths and then uses those strengths to support other families in the community.

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HIPPY's complete focus is on children in the family. Adults are considered resources to help children achieve success in schools. The HIPPY curriculum is very structured with pre-planned lessons and worksheets. There are few opportunities for improvisation and no direct assistance for parents who have trouble with their own literacy skills. The home visitors' main role is to help parents understand how to carry out the week's lesson with their children. The child is not taught by the home visitor and is absent in many cases. Assessment is most often lacking or unsystematic, although some programs do administer parent inventories and standardized literacy tests for adults and children. HIPPY provides a model that encourages family reading and writing and higher self-esteem but does not address other needs such as low parental literacy.

In summary, these three models illustrate several key features of family literacy programs:

- providing early and continuous support to families for intergenerational learning;
- encouraging language development and interactive play as precursors to emergent literacy;
- supplying age-appropriate books, printed materials, and lessons;
- assisting families with medical, social, and educational services; and
- building feelings of self-efficacy for family members by providing multiple opportunities for success.

By synthesizing these features and others with their own philosophical orientations and unique contexts, family literacy programs may be able to create educational agendas that reflect their own particular needs and goals with coherent instructional practices, assessment methods, staff training, and social support for participants.

Michigan Family Literacy Study

This study was part of a two-year research project that examined family literacy programs in Michigan. That state was selected as the site for this work based on the cultural diversity of the population, the wide variety of rural, urban, and suburban settings, and a long-term historical involvement with adult literacy instruction that has taken place outside of traditional school settings. The purpose of this project was to identify and describe existing family literacy programs throughout the state in order (a) to publish and distribute a comprehensive list of services throughout the state that could inform and assist participants, practitioners, and administrators in locating needed information, and (b) to identify and document the variety of family literacy services implemented in different communities.

In 1993–4, approximately 700 literacy programs in Michigan were contacted by telephone or mailed surveys to determine if they could be classified as family literacy programs. The main criterion for selection was the inclusion of an interactive literacy component between children and parents. Fifty of the 700 contacted programs were categorized as family literacy programs, and more detailed information regarding their structure, curricula, target population, and philosophy was obtained by telephone interviews. These data were organized according to program location (rural, urban, suburban), population characteristics (ethnicity, gender, etc.), size, use of specific models and funding sources, and the critical features mentioned earlier, goals, instructional practices, assessment methods, staff training, and social support for participants. From this information, a representative sample of 11 family literacy programs was chosen for in-depth study based on variation across these key characteristics. During planned visits, program administrators, participants, and teachers were interviewed, classes were observed, and survey information was collected. The combination of these data sources provided information for descriptive case studies that demonstrate both the commonalties and differences among programs. Examination of these cases illustrates multiple interpretations of family literacy, reveals the critical attributes of successful programs, and identifies problems and needs.

Maple Tree Even Start: A Kenan Model Program

The Kenan Trust Family Literacy Model has been adopted by numerous family literacy programs and is illustrated in the following description of Maple Tree Even Start. The Maple Tree program is located in a suburb of Detroit where it primarily serves a population of Chaldean-speaking women and their children who have immigrated from Iraq. Maple Tree Even Start was established in the spring of 1991 and emphasizes training in English as a Second Language in order to meet the needs of the community. Currently, the program has day classes operating at three local elementary school sites and offers an additional home visiting component. Program staff advocate improving the educational level of the whole family and support Even Start's general philosophy that "Parents are the child's first teacher."

Maple Tree Even Start employs one director, two half-time coordinators who are also half-time teachers, one full-time preschool teacher, one full-time adult education/parent teacher, three preschool aides, and one full-time bilingual aide. Each staff member has his/her own area of expertise as reflected by educational degrees and experience. This program has served as many as 186 parents and children per year. Participants are primarily young mothers with low levels of education who have not yet obtained their high school diploma. The majority of these mothers do not use English as a first language, and they lack the conventional literacy skills needed for daily activities. Most of the participants come from low income families and receive some form of government assistance. To be eligible for enrollment as specified by national Even Start guidelines, participants must qualify for adult basic education services and must have a child under the age of eight.

Maple Tree Even Start classes are held four days a week for two and a half hours. The average parent class size ranges from 15 to 20 participants with a similar number in the children's classes. In addition to the center-based classes, staff also visit the families at home once or twice a month to provide additional support and literacy instruction for both adult and child. A certified teacher and a paraprofessional visit the home with materials and activities that promote the skill development of the child, encourage parent/child interaction, and teach the basic skills appropriate to the subject and level that the adult is trying to improve.

The program's curriculum follows the components promoted by the Kenan Model: adult education, parenting support, early childhood education, and interactive parent-child activities. Adults spend six hours a week in classes geared toward GED certificate attainment, job employability skills, and/or ESL improvement. The Even Start instructional program promotes adult literacy through individualized educational plans established for each participant through testing, observation, and parent assessment forms. Practical and achievable goals are set and re-set throughout the year to meet the adults' individual needs. Group instruction, one-on-one instruction, flash cards, independent study, and computerized instruction are among the methods used during Individual Skills Time.

The Maple Tree program bases the parenting support component of the Kenan Model on the Bowdoin Method Parenting Course, which focuses on the skills that parents need to help their children with school readiness. Parents participate for four hours a week in this component, which includes viewing videos, reading parenting skills books, and participating in educational activities that focus on both cognitive and affective skills in parenting. It is divided into units such as How to Teach Your Child at Home, How to Develop Your Child's Self-Esteem, and How to Manage Your Child for Good Behavior. Other aspects of parent education at the Maple Tree program include a six-week nutrition course, expert speakers discussing health and environmental issues, and a free "make-and-take" children's game workshop.

While the parents attend their adult classes, the children are in a supervised preschool room participating in readiness activities to help prepare them for school. The children are assessed when they enter the program and teachers use this information along with their knowledge of age-appropriate skills to plan individual and small group activities that extend what the children already know. A whole-language/thematic approach is used in the preschool classroom where a creative, organized curriculum revolves around a central theme, with an emphasis on play and hands-on activities.

The final component of Maple Tree Even Start is the Parents And Children Together (PACT) interaction time, when parents actively support and participate in the education of their children. For a total of two and half hours a week, adults and children come into the preschool room to work together on a child-selected activity, such as painting or playing with manipulatives. PACT time may also involve group story-telling sessions, which often focus on a theme being used in both the child and adult classrooms. Appropriate ways of reading are modeled to the parent during this time and an emphasis is placed on the importance of interactive reading, asking questions, and having the child reread the story. Parents and children are then given time to read together. In addition, family field trips are often taken to places such as the zoo or library.

Assessment for the Maple Tree Even Start program includes pre, post, and ongoing evaluation of participants' progress. As a requirement of the National Even Start Evaluation, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) is given to obtain the participants' reading levels. The Botel Reading Inventory and/or the Adult Basic Learning Exam (ABLE II) are administered to adults to assess grade levels in reading, math, and specific living skills. Adult students with limited English skills are also tested on the English Language Skills Assessment

(ELSA) to determine a beginner, intermediate, or advanced level of study. Informal assessments for adults include interviews and journal writing. The children are evaluated with the Brigance Inventory of Early Development to ascertain the appropriate focus for educational activities. The children are also tested with the Pre-Screening Inventory (PSI) for any major developmental delays and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) to determine receptive vocabulary. In addition, portfolios are beginning to be used to document the educational and developmental progress of each child involved in the program.

Maple Tree's strongest collaborative effort in support of family education is with the Job Training Partnership Act Program (JTPA). Even Start adult participants attend JTPA's computer lab two days a week where they work on improving their skills in academic areas for their GED certificate, along with learning computer and job skills. A bilingual aide works in both Even Start and JTPA to help foster communication between staff, participants, and their families. JTPA recognizes that participants are literate in their own cultures and utilizes these literacy abilities through the use of computer programs that accommodate the Arabic dialect. These programs are used to create newsletters distributed in both English and Arabic to students, their families, and other community members. In addition, a family literacy component is incorporated into JTPA by using software that teaches adult participants vocabulary that corresponds to the vocabulary used in a children's book series. These books are available for the adults to take home and read with their children.

In a further attempt to enrich their program, Maple Tree Even Start has also reached out to the surrounding community in various cooperative efforts. They coordinate their advertisement recruiting efforts with Head Start and collaborate on several parenting programs. Connections with local health agencies and hospitals permit them to bring in qualified speakers to discuss important medical and hygiene issues. A cooperative program with the public library allows parents to visit the library on a regular basis and learn how to select books for their children. Even Start has further involved itself with many social agencies by making cross-references.

Maple Tree Even Start provides a comprehensive program that is informed in part by the participants' cultural background. Administrators and teachers feel that the program must continue to learn more about its clients' unique culture in order to address their needs sensitively. There is also a pressing demand for the creation of additional bilingual materials, more authentic means of assessment, and better communication between parents and teachers. In general, the staff would like to create more of their own curricula, design more authentic evaluations, and find ways in which to blend their individual areas of expertise in order to enrich the family component of the program.

Allen Prison: Parents as Partners in Reading Model

Allen Prison, an all-male correctional facility, began using the Parents as Partners in Reading Program in November of 1992. It is offered to inmates in two-hour, biweekly sessions over a six-week period. The prison provides this program twice a year in conjunction with other services such as one-on-one tutoring, adult basic education, and job skills. The overall goal of the Parents as Partners in Reading program is to get parents, in this case, incarcerated fathers, to become involved in literacy activities with their children and to understand the value and importance of reading to their children for success in later school years.

The adult basic education (ABE) teacher is responsible for initiating, as well as providing instruction for, the Parents as Partners in Reading Program at the prison. Her guiding belief is that parents really need to know how important reading is and they need to teach their

kids how to read because it will affect them for the rest of their lives. The participants in the program are all imprisoned fathers who sign up for the program on a voluntary basis. Although most of these participants are mid- to high-level readers, occasionally a low-level reader joins the program. A typical session enrolls approximately 30 participants, with ages ranging from 19 to 45.

The ABE teacher at Allen Prison follows the basic curriculum prescribed by Patricia Edward's Parents as Partners in Reading Program, incorporating the three phases of coaching, peer modeling, and parent-child interaction. The initial coaching sessions consist of the ABE teacher modeling book reading to the inmates and demonstrating interactive strategies to use when reading to young children. Inmates learn the importance of varying their voices when reading, making hand gestures and using facial expressions, asking and answering questions about pictures and texts, and connecting the story of the text to their children's lives. Participants also engage in group discussions about the benefits of reading to children, and they learn ways to promote literacy development at home. Videotapes from the Parents as Partners in Reading curricula are used to reinforce major concepts throughout the program.

The second phase of peer modeling provides participants with the opportunity to practice the book reading strategies that they are learning and to receive useful feedback from the instructor and each another. The inmates are paired together so that fathers can take turns modeling how they would read a book to their child while their partner provides guidance and further suggestions for improvement. During this phase, participants gain first-hand experience on how they can expand, clarify, and modify the written language of books to best suit the developing abilities of their children. This allows the participants to become more comfortable and creative with their newly acquired book reading techniques while receiving support and encouragement from fellow participants.

The final phase of Edward's Parents as Partners in Reading Program involves parent-child interaction. Structured supervision of this phase is not possible in the prison. However, an inmate committee voted to allocate money from their Inmate Benefit Fund to the program to provide a cart of children's books in the visiting room. Fathers now have materials on hand to read to their children. During visiting hours, inmates are strongly encouraged to read the variety of books that they have practiced with their instructor and peers to their children. By putting what they have learned into practice, fathers can realize the significant role that they can play in promoting the literacy development of their children.

In addition to the three instructional phases of Parents as Partners in Reading, this program has attempted to modify the model to suit its own special circumstances. Staff members have incorporated a book-making component to allow participating inmates to create books for their children. The books are bound on a binding machine that was specifically purchased for this purpose, and then they are presented to the children as gifts. The creation of these books allows fathers to enhance their own writing skills while putting into practice their knowledge of what is appropriate for encouraging their own child's literacy development. In another effort to expand this program, the instructor is currently trying to obtain funds to audiotape the inmates reading the books that they have created, as well as other age-appropriate books, in order to send these taped stories home with their children. Although formal evaluations of participant progress are not conducted in this program, the instructor does utilize the inmates' comments to ascertain if they are learning what is being taught. Considering the circumstances and restraints placed upon both the teacher and the participants, this program, through the use of Parents as Partners in Reading, has made a creative and adaptive attempt to promote family literacy.

Michigan HIPPY Program

The Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY 1993) model was adopted by a family literacy program in a large metropolitan city in southwestern Michigan in September of 1990. In the past two years, this program has served 180 families, many of whom live in high-risk neighborhoods. The program provides services to families with children 3 to 5 years of age. Most of the adults participating in HIPPY are female. Families in HIPPY encompass a variety of racial and ethnic groups, including African American, Caucasian, Native American, and a large Hispanic population. The Michigan HIPPY Program employs ten staff, including a program coordinator, a program assistant, and eight home visitors, several of whom are bilingual. The majority of home visitors were once participants in HIPPY themselves and are active parents in the community. Although many of these visitors do not have formal educational backgrounds in early childhood education, they have a great deal of practical experience. The administrator has an advanced degree, as well as a teaching credential. Each week she meets with the staff to review the upcoming week's lesson, practice implementation, and share suggestions for enhancing lesson plans.

HIPPY home visitors generally serve 10–12 families and visit each family's home once a week for about an hour. Over the course of two years, each family involved in HIPPY receives 60 structured activity packets and 16 books. These materials are available in both English and Spanish to accommodate the language of the participating family. Bilingual home visitors are matched with Spanish-speaking families to facilitate communication during the role-playing sessions with the parent. HIPPY acknowledges that families are literate in their native language and builds upon this strength in teaching parents to educate the children.

The home visitor brings HIPPY books and supplemental activity packets into each home, models appropriate reading strategies, and role-plays the extension activities with parents. The visitor is not considered to be a reading instructor for parents. Adults with low levels of reading must find assistance with basic skills elsewhere. Because home visitors spend their time modeling for the parents, children need not be present during this time. During the week, parents take charge of the learning activities, working with their children for 10–20 minutes each day. Parents and children read books together and perform the corresponding activities on their own. Parents update the home visitor on their child's progress during the next visit.

The activity packets consist of a variety of learning tasks and games to assist the children's development in several target areas including tactile, visual, auditory, and conceptual discrimination, language development, verbal expression, eye-hand coordination, pre-math concepts, logical thinking, self-concept, and creativity. Home visitors also bring manipulatives and use materials present in the home so that children can gain first-hand experience with the week's task. For example, the week's concept may involve discriminating big and small or tall and short. Along with the book and activity packet curriculum, the home visitor may bring familiar items such as balls of various sizes and also utilize household items such as socks of different lengths. During the home visit, the parents will work on how best to teach their children the discriminative concepts, read the corresponding book, and role-play each activity in the packet with the home visitor. During the week, parents read the book of the week interactively with their child/children and guide them through the prescribed tasks, as well as sometimes creating extension activities with materials in their home. HIPPY also provides a lending library of books and toys for their families.

Parents, home visitors, and the coordinator meet together as a group twice a month to discuss family and parenting issues. Parents are provided with information relevant to child development, as well as informal activities to expand learning at home. This information is collected from various pre-existing curricula. The group meetings help to bring parents into contact with

other parents who are struggling with similar issues. Transportation is available on a limited basis, child care is provided, and nutritional snacks are offered as incentives for families to attend. In addition, field trips are organized for the entire family to visit community sites such as libraries, museums, and zoos.

The Michigan HIPPY Program uses observations as its primary assessment tool. Home visitors observe participating parents as they role-play activities together to ensure that parents are grasping the concepts that they will be teaching to their children. The national HIPPY office requires that each HIPPY program collect information on participating children. They recommend observational reports, and later, when HIPPY graduates enter school, the use of Child Classroom Adaptation Index (CCAI) to determine children's functioning in the classroom. Some type of evaluation of the parent groups to determine their effectiveness is also required. The observational reports and evaluations are most often unsystematic and rarely follow progress in any consistent way.

The Michigan HIPPY Program offers a unique, home-based approach that also nurtures supportive networks among families. However, persistent problems include a singular focus on children alone, a lack of systematic evaluation methods, a weak referral system, and poor attendance at group meetings. This program motivates parents to become their children's primary teacher by learning how to promote their children's academic success through parent-child interactions. Although it does encourage parents to build upon family strengths, it does not directly address parents' own needs, social or academic.

Although the programs described above have formed their services around a particular model, several family literacy programs that we visited created models of their own in direct response to community needs. The following program summary provides an excellent illustration of this type of program.

Christian Outreach Center

The Christian Outreach Center has for many years been in the process of actively developing a family literacy program to prepare children for school success by promoting family involvement. The center is located in an impoverished neighborhood that has a high incidence of crime, violence, and drug abuse. Low income African Americans constitute over three fourths of the people in the community, and there is a high predominance of single-parent, female-headed households. The students who attend the local elementary school across the street from the center have the lowest standardized test scores in the city.

The center was established in 1988 in a former church facility to provide one-on-one literacy tutoring for adults. This adult literacy component was soon expanded to include an after-school program for children and teenagers where they could receive help with their schoolwork and learn new skills on the computers that were added to supplement both the adult and child literacy programs. In response to the community need for assistance in learning how to help their children get ready to attend school, the Christian Outreach Center also began a Reading Partners program where preschool children and their mothers can attend a story-telling session that models effective reading strategies. Another unique effort to promote family literacy was established on the basketball court. Basketball Literacy targets fathers and their children by providing recreational activities on an indoor basketball court on Saturday mornings, as well as offering reading assistance and a wide selection of books and literacy activities for fathers to read to their children during their time off the court. The popularity of this program has spawned a teenage version several evenings a week. Both girls and boys are able to remain in the center and play as long as they spend their time off court engaged in one of the many literacy activities avail-

able to them, such as individual tutoring, computer time, or watching educational videos. This innovative program provides both a safe haven in a violent area and a chance for teenagers to engage in positive experiences with literacy activities.

There are four members on the center staff associated with family literacy. They are the (a) adult/family literacy administrator, who oversees the entire program; (b) the youth coordinator, who is in charge of parent/child interaction centering around books, tapes and videos, and the after-school and Basketball Literacy programs; (c) the child coordinator, who assists with child care issues, arranges story times, and devises thematically based, hands-on activities and crafts for the preschool child/parent program; and (d) computer coordinator, a VISTA worker, who supervises activities in the lab, and instructs participants in learning computer skills and in the use of specific math and language arts computer programs. The staff has had to learn a great deal about literacy and families as the program evolves. Their educational backgrounds did not necessarily prepare them for their positions. However, the youth coordinator, having been raised in a similar neighborhood, has good rapport with the teenagers and young adults.

The center recently received a matching grant, which allowed the board of directors, administrator, and teachers to expand their family literacy program, and concentrate more on bringing parents and their children together in activities revolving around literacy and mathematics. The design of a new program that focused on interaction between preschool children and their parents was planned collaboratively and the curricula was borrowed from a variety of sources. Along with the creation of this program, a mission statement was authored that reads: "The purpose of our focus on family literacy is to provide a flexible program for building reading and math skills through involving parents with children in the learning process." To begin to accomplish this goal, 16 dyads of adults and children were scheduled to attend classes twice a week for three-hour sessions, over a ten-week period.

Because the staff had limited resources and were unfamiliar with early childhood curriculums, they decided to base their family literacy instruction on age-appropriate math and literacy computer software that was already in their possession. They had originally found this software in an educational catalog. There are multiple components within the literacy software that allow the staff to build literacy activities based on the included stories. Each week, a story with a particular theme is used. The stories allow for individual input and are represented in three modes: a computer version, a print version, and a tape version. For example, a "Yes, Yes, Yes, No, No, No" theme focuses on exploring the likes and dislikes of each child in the program. A computer program illustrates several things that children are familiar with such as monsters, ice cream, bees, and reading. Children respond to the item by clicking on a yes or no box on the computer to indicate whether or not they like the item displayed and described. Print and audio versions of the same activity are utilized. This theme is extended into a hands-on activity as children draw things they like and dislike on a paper plate with one side labeled no and one side yes. Parents help guide their children in all activities. In addition, parents receive hand-outs on the subject of how the unique likes and dislikes of children affect their personality and how to best encourage children to identify their interests. The participants are divided into four groups, with one working on the computer itself, another with the print and tape versions, a third with a related hands-on activity, and the fourth working on separate computer math programs.

The computer curriculum begins to provide instruction in the skills children need to master before entering school. Additional non-computer activities focus on skill building in the areas of drawing, writing, and cutting while familiarizing children with shapes, numbers, colors, and letters. Storytellers from the local library present culturally diverse books and songs and involve children and parents interactively in music, literature, and dance. A collection of adults' and children's work is beginning to be placed in portfolios in an attempt to measure progress. This collection of work is not systematic in nature.

The Christian Outreach Center staff members make a great effort to support members of the community in need of assistance. They obtain many referrals from a nearby drug rehabilitation program, from the court system, and from mailings to several social agencies. The center's affiliation with a large Christian church provides many tutors for their one-on-one literacy instruction and after-school programs. They have also established many outside contacts and through these can refer their participants for job training and GED skills classes. In addition, the center has a liaison with a prominent local Children's Hospital. It is their hope that collaboration with this hospital will result in the design of an effective parenting component to supplement their existing family literacy activities.

Christian Outreach Center aims to assist families in improving their lives in ways that are congruent with their expressed needs and goals. Their family literacy Program is being implemented to build the bond between the child and the parent while improving adult literacy skills and preparing children for more successful academic and social experiences in the school environment. They need more knowledge about emergent literacy, adult education methods, and systematic means of assessment. However, even with these needs, they are still able to serve the neighborhood by providing a safe and educational environment for community members, helping adults build basic skills, and assisting parents in preparing their young children for school.

Conclusions

Our research on family literacy programs in Michigan revealed both strengths and problems in the field. Each of the programs we visited had its own particular goals, instructional practices, assessment methods, staff qualifications and training, and means of socially supporting clients. We found that pre-existing models can provide some guidance for programs that have little direction. The framework of the Kenan Model, for example, gives new programs a basic outline of what areas are important for a family literacy program to support. Parents as Partners in Reading can assist programs in designing their parent/child interactive reading component. HIPPY can provide a strong early childhood component that attempts to empower parents as their child's first teacher. All of these models have their problems in terms of adequately providing a complete and inclusive framework for new and existing programs. Some programs, like the Christian Outreach Center, look at popular models and find that they do not meet their needs, so they create their own framework by taking bits and pieces from various commercial materials and packaged curricula. This tactic may lead to a hodge podge of materials and activities without a coherent framework or design and requires collaboration and negotiation among the staff to insure that the needs of the participants are met in an educationally sound program.

These four representative programs, as well the dozens of other family literacy programs that we visited in Michigan, revealed the following strengths of successful programs:

- Responsiveness to cultural, familial, and community characteristics
- Collaboration with surrounding agencies (social, medical, governmental, job skills programs)
- Good referral system
- Overcome barriers that would otherwise hinder increased access and participation (These include physical barriers such as transportation and child care, as well as emotional barriers, such as fear of school and of being negatively judged.)

- Attempt to make curricula meaningful and useful to participants
- Balance of program components to include a significant amount of time spent on age-interactive activities, which include good instruction and modeling
- Emphasis on understanding developmentally appropriate materials
- Provision of age-appropriate materials to families
- Increase self-efficacy through successful learning experiences
- Build bridges between parents and teachers, home and school
- Secure funding source
- Stable, collaborative staff with varied credentials and areas of expertise including community members with practical knowledge

In addition to these exhibited strengths, there are several weaknesses apparent in family literacy programs. These include the following:

- Lack of theoretical support for development of program components
- Unbalanced components in terms of family literacy emphasis (i.e., not enough time spent on adult/child activities, too much time spent on conventional skill instruction or the reverse, too much time spent on social issues)
- Assessment that does not match pedagogy or is insensitive to individual progress and the specific program services and curriculum
- Outdated, irrelevant curricula (pre-packaged curricula that does not easily lend itself to modification or curricula designed without theoretical backing)
- Rigid adherence to procedures in a set model or plan
- Narrow perspective on family literacy, often evident in a single focus on adult or early childhood education
- Inadequate staff training and high turnover
- Insecure funding, which can lead to an unstable, uninvested staff
- Transient population that must focus on survival before considering the value of literacy

In conclusion, these factors provide a broad overview of the critical strengths and pressing needs in family literacy programs. Because the field of family literacy is changing rapidly, it needs theory and research to guide services and practices, not commercial interests alone. A greater integration of emergent literacy and adult literacy is needed to make practices interactive and intergenerational. Curricula have to be carefully designed to be individualized and goal oriented, meaningful and relevant to participants' lives. Programs need authentic, process-oriented assessments that are outcome based, and reflect progress accurately. Because family literacy programs influence more than conventional literacy skills, programs have to consider a wide range of needs of their clients in order to help improve the standard of living in their communities.

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